

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 6077

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, SNAR, BL

SUBJECT: EDWIN TAPIA RESIGNS OVER NARCOTICS SCANDAL

1. EDWIN TAPIA PRESENTED HIS RESIGNATION AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY AND PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON STRUCTURAL REFORMS (CONARE) SEPTEMBER 17, FOLLOWING REVELATION OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF ONE OF HIS CLOSEST POLITICAL FOLLOWERS IN A MAJOR NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING SCANDAL. ACCORDING TO REPORTS CIRCULATING IN LA PAZ DURING RECENT WEEKS, AND CONFIRMED IN THE CONFIDENTIAL NEWSLETTER IPE ON SEPTEMBER 16, TAPIA'S PRIVATE SECRETARY ALBERTO SANCHEZ BELLO, FORMER CHIEF OF THE BARRIENTISTA YOUTH, WAS ARRESTED IN CANADA WITH TWO BOLIVIAN COMPANIONS DURING AUGUST ON CHARGES OF BRINGING A LARGE QUANTITY OF COCAINE INTO THE COUNTRY. AT THE TIME OF HIS ARREST, SANCHEZ WAS TRAVELLING ON A DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT, WHICH HAD BEEN GRANTED TO HIM AT THE EXPRESS REQUEST OF TAPIA.

2. PRESIDENT BANZER REPORTEDLY IS HIGHLY ANGERED OVER THIS DEVELOPMENT AND HAS PERSONALLY REQUESTED THE RESIGNATION OF TAPIA, DESPITE THE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN THE TWO MEN IN RECENT MONTHS. BANZER ALSO HAS REVOKED SANCHEZ' DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT, AND ORDERED AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PASSPORT WAS
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ISSUED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY; WE ARE INFORMED THAT THE

SUB-SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MARCELO OSTRIA, MAY LOSE HIS POST AS A RESULT OF HAVING AUTHORIZED THE ISSUANCE OF THE DIPLOMATIC PASSPORT. MINISTER OF FINANCE CASTILLO IS ALSO REPORTED TO BE UNDER INVESTIGATION, AS IT WAS HIS MINISTRY WHICH ISSUED THE TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION FOR SANCHEZ' TRIP TO CANADA.

3. COMMENT: PRESIDENT BANZER HAS ACTED WITH ENERGY AND DISPATCH IN AN ATTEMPT TO CLARIFY THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THIS SCANDAL. IN SO DOING, HE HAS DISPLAYED A WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE ONE OF HIS CLOSEST POLITICAL ADVISORS, WHO HAS BEEN DIRECTING THE GOB'S POLITICAL REFORM EFFORTS SINCE THE CREATION OF CONARE IN JULY 1974. MEANWHILE THE EXTENT OF TAPIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN SANCHEZ BELLO'S NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IS CURRENTLY THE SUBJECT OF AN INVESTIGATION, BEGUN AT THE INSTIGATION OF BOTH BANZER AND TAPIA HIMSELF. WHATEVER THE RESULTS OF THIS INVESTIGATION, HOWEVER, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE POLITICAL FORTUNES OF TAPIA AND THE POLITICAL MOVEMENT WHICH HE HEADS (THE BARRIENTISTA FRB) HAVE BEEN SEVERLY DAMAGED BY THESE REVELATIONS. STEDMAN

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